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So You'd Like To Adopt A Wild Horse... Or Burro?

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There are now more than 70,000 wild horses and burros roaming the public lands in the West. In fact, wild horse and burro herds have increased to the point where, in some areas, they now pose a threat to themselves and to their environment. When this happens, rangelands and deserts are overgrazed and the animals deprived of adequate forage. As a result, thousands will need to be removed each year from the public lands for their own good. Hopefully, new homes can be found for as many of them as possible.

The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 calls for management, protection, and control of all unbranded and unclaimed horses and burros on public lands administered by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Although there is definitely a place for herds of wild horses and burros on the public lands as a reminder of our frontier heritage, the question of how to control overpopulation is difficult and serious.

Wild horses and burros are not native to America and they have few natural enemies. As their numbers grow, they compete for food with livestock and wildlife. Soon the land is unable to provide enough forage. Eventually, the land suffers too.

The only possible solution is management by man.

The law does allow control of wild horse and burro numbers. The most extreme method for doing this would be shooting the animals on the open range. There just has to be a better way, and BLM officials have a partial solution at least.

Almost everyone, at some time during his or her lifetime, has wanted a horse to ride and care for, or may have wanted a burro as a pet. With the hope that many people haven't completely forgotten such wishes, BLM has a program under which wild horses and burros can be "adopted" for care in "foster homes" by qualified persons.

Through well-planned and humanely conducted roundups, BLM captures excess wild horses and burros from overpopulated public lands and makes them available to individuals.

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Q. Must I be a U.S. resident to apply for a horse or burro?

A. Yes. We cannot assign an animal to anyone living outside the 50 States and U.S. territories.

Q. What happens to my application after I've submitted it?

A. Your application is screened as to the kind of facilities you have and your ability to care for the animal. You will be notified by letter if your application has been accepted or rejected. If accepted, your name will be placed on a register, and you will be advised when your animal is available and where to pick it up. How long this will take depends upon the number of roundups staged, the quantity of horses or burros captured, and the number of names on the register.

Q. May I adopt more than one horse or burro?

A. Yes, you may ask for as many as you think your facilities will accommodate and you can afford to feed and maintain.

For further information, write:

Adopt A Horse
Bureau of Land Management
Denver Federal Center, Building 50
Denver, Colorado 80225

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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Although these animals appear similar to domestic animals, there is one major difference—they are wild. A training period is required to tame them. But it is important to remember that these animals have not had a life of individual care and attention that an owner would have given them. They may be undernourished and their appearance may be different from that of most domestic horses and burros. However, with care, food and attention, these animals can become gentle, affectionate companions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ADOPTING A WILD HORSE OR BURRO

The following questions and answers may help you decide whether or not you would like to take care of a horse or a burro for its lifetime while, at the same time, doing your part to protect the environment:

Q. How do I go about getting a wild horse or burro?

A. By submitting an application which tells us what type of animal you want and the kind of facilities you have for its care. An application can be obtained from: Adopt A Horse, Bureau of Land Management, Denver Federal Center, Bldg. 50, Denver, Colorado 80225.

Q. What does it cost?

A. The animal is free. But there is a small fee ($10 to $20) for a health certificate when you pick up the animal. Each animal is checked by a veterinarian and cleared for transport. You must also bear the cost of transporting the animal to its "foster home" and all costs for its future upkeep, including veterinarian charges. Inquire locally to determine costs for maintenance of the animal in your particular area.

Q. Are there any restrictions on use of the animal once it's in my care?

A. The animal cannot be used for any commercial purpose, which means renting it out or using it for any moneymaking project. Otherwise, you can train the animal for riding, working, showing or any other personal reason, such as keeping it as a pet.

Q. Will the animal be mine after I pick it up?

A. No. The Federal Government remains legal custodian. However, you will have custody for its lifetime as long as you follow the terms of the maintenance contract. The animal cannot be sold. It may, however, be reassigned to another party with the written approval of the Bureau of Land Management.

Q. What if I receive a mare or jenny that's carrying a foal?

A. Any offspring would belong to you.

Q. Does the Government check up on the animal after it reaches its new home?

A. Yes. BLM, or someone acting on the Agency's behalf, may check to make sure it is being treated well and that its "foster parents" are living up to the conditions of the contract.

Q. Where would I pick up the animal?

A. At a distribution center. BLM tries to make an animal available for you at the distribution center nearest your home, but this is not always possible. It may be necessary to travel a considerable distance.

Q. Where are the distribution centers?

A. These are set up in the States where the roundups occur. Roundups are held in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming.

Q. Must I be a certain age to adopt a wild horse or burro?

A. No. But, if you are not of legal age in your State, you must have your parent or guardian also sign the application.

Q. What must I do if the animal dies?

A. You must notify the Bureau of Land Management at the address given at the end of this brochure. It is not necessary to have a veterinarian verify the cause of death. You cannot sell the carcass to any facility that would process it into a commercial product. The carcass should be disposed of according to the sanitation requirements of your State. Burying or burning the carcass is the usual method.

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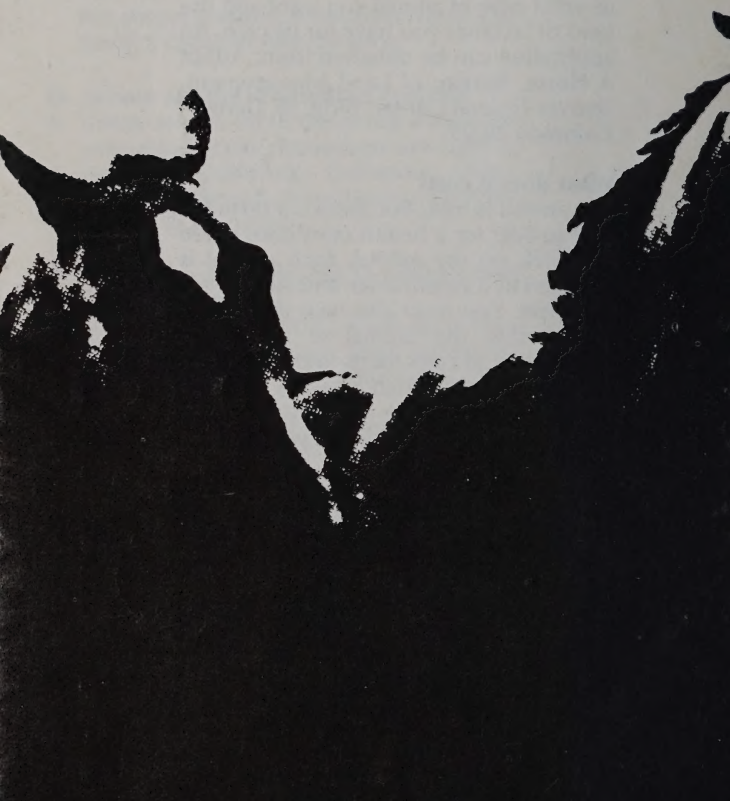
Bureau of Land Management

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